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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000495

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DUBAI FOR PAO AND MEDIA HUB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2012  
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [OA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)  
SUBJECT: WADAH KHANFAR LOSES POSITION AS MEMBER OF AL  
JAZEERA BOARD; MAY ALSO LOSE JOB MANAGING AL JAZEERA NETWORK

REF: A. 06 DOHA 312  
[1](#)B. 06 DOHA 328  
[1](#)C. 06 DOHA 526  
[1](#)D. 06 DOHA 1614

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a long-awaited move, the Amir has appointed a new board of governors for the Al Jazeera Network (AJN). Highlights include: the retention of Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer as chairman; the replacement of Wadah Khanfar as a board member and possibly as manager of the entire AJ Network; the appointment of a strongly anti-Khanfar Qatari to the Board; and the extension of members' period of office from one year to three years. In our assessment, Khanfar's position in the Al Jazeera hierarchy has been considerably weakened by this change. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) An Amiri decree issued May 15 named the seven-member board as follows:

[1](#)3. (C) Chairman - Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani(HBT). A cousin and close friend of the Amir, HBT is the chairman of Qatar TV and Radio Corporation and is generally the "media" king in Qatar. He has been in charge of Al Jazeera since its inception in 1996 and has managed to keep the Al Jazeera phenomenon in a protective bubble away from any serious interference by the powerful Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, who has often characterized Al Jazeera as a foreign policy "headache."

[1](#)4. (C) Deputy chairman and Managing Director: Ahmad Abdullah Al Kholeifi. Also a member of the previous AJ Board and, most recently, the spokesman for the Doha Asian Games Committee. Al Kholeifi's star has been on the rise since then. (Note: The title "Managing Director" assigned to him raises questions about the current role of Wadah Khanfar (whose title had been "Director General") as the head of AJN. This issue is not addressed in the Amiri decree. One of the new board members told PAO May 16 that he interprets this specific appointment as meaning that Khanfar will return to running the Arabic channel and relinquish overall management of the Network. We will follow up on this important point. End note.

[1](#)5. (C) Member: Hamad Abdul Aziz Al Kuwari. New to the AJ Board, Al Kuwari served as Qatar's last Minister of Information (the ministry was disbanded in 1996 after the current amir came to power). A senior Qatari of some stature,

he also served as a member of the committee that drafted Qatar's constitution and now serves as an adviser to the GCC. He is known as a moderate, with liberal tendencies and with something of an Arab nationalist worldview.

¶6. (U) Member: Abdullah Mubarak Al Kholeifi: A member of the previous board. A senior employee of Qatar TV and Radio Corporation. A low-profile personality.

¶7. (C) Member: Mahmoud Shammam. An American citizen of Libyan descent, Shammam was a member of the previous board, having been appointed to it by the Amir personally. Known for his strongly anti-Khanfar views, Shammam has frequently criticized Al Jazeera's editorial policies and programming (Ref C).

¶8. (C) Member: Abdul Aziz Al Mahmoud. New to the Board, Al Mahmoud previously served as director of Al Jazeera's Arabic website. He left the position in 2006 after falling out with Wadah Khanfar (Ref B), and is currently serving as managing editor of a new Arabic language newspaper, to be launched later this year. (Note: Al Jazeera also has plans to launch a new regional newspaper (Ref D). We asked Al Mahmoud whether this would represent a conflict of interest, and he said the new newspaper will have a separate board of directors. End note.)

¶9. (C) Member: Mariam Rashed Yousouf Al Khater. New to the Board, and its only woman member, Al Khater currently serves as head of media for the Supreme Council of Family Affairs and is a well-known newspaper columnist. She has frequently called for local media to engage meaningfully with local issues and is a proponent of a strong, independent media.

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¶10. (U) The May 15 Amiri decree also stipulated that the period of office for the new Board will be three years, instead of one. (Note: It has been an ongoing complaint of Board members that a one-year period of office is insufficient to undertake and complete any strategic work effectively. This change will empower the new board members in this sense. End note.) With the exception of Mahmoud Shammam, the current board members are all Qatari citizens. Ref A reports on the make-up of the previous board.

¶11. (C) Replaced Board Members:

-- Wadah Khanfar -- Khanfar has recently been the subject of strong criticism in local media, particularly the daily Arabic language newspaper, Al Watan. Critics charge that Khanfar discriminates against Qataris in the hiring practices of Al Jazeera and thus prevents them from sharing in the share of Qatari wealth spent on Al Jazeera. The media campaign against him, taking this local angle, has clearly borne fruit.

-- Khalf Ahmed Al Mannai -- formerly in the Deputy Chairman position of the board (without the "Managing Director" title now assigned to new Deputy Ahmed Al Kholeifi). A reclusive figure and long-time number two and confidant of HBT.

-- Ilham Al Bader: Host of a popular morning radio talk show, Ilham Al Bader has recently gone off the air amid rumors of personality conflicts between her and officials at Qatar radio.

Comment

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¶12. (C) It is unclear at the moment whether Wadah Khanfar is to be replaced both as a board member and as the overall manager of the Al Jazeera Network, and remain with only limited duties as the head of the Arabic channel. It is very clear, however that his overall position has been considerably weakened. We will report with further analysis

as the situation becomes clearer.

UNTERMEYER